



TORY VIRUS FAILURE COSTS LIVES

LACK OF EQUIPMENT IS 'NATIONAL SCANDAL' >>PAGE 7 PEOPLE FORCED INTO WORK BY GREEDY BOSSES >>PAGE 17 VULNERABLE PEOPLE HAVE CARE WITHDRAWN >>PAGE 4



Socialist Worker

£1 | No 2698 | 1 - 7 April 2020 | socialistworker.co.uk

NHS CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

BLOOD ON HIS HANDS

THE CORONAVIRUS crisis has exposed the damage the Tories have caused to the NHS. And it will cost lives.

We need to demand that the NHS gets all the resources it needs—immediately. People must come before profit. I

t's great to see people coming out at 8pm on Thursday evenings to applaud NHS workers.

But the sight last week of Boris Johnson and chancellor Rishi Sunak clapping on Downing Street was staggering hypocrisy.

The Tories have savaged the NHS. It went into this crisis with



100,000 unfilled vacancies, 17,000 beds closed in the last ten years and poorly paid, badly treated staff.

We should build on the collective mood of support for the NHS to fight for a properly funded, privatisation-free health service. We need to build stronger opposition to the Tories who continue to gamble with our lives.

We don't need "national unity" with Johnson and his toxic crew.

Instead we need more of the strikes and other actions we have seen in Britain and across the world.

HISTORY

The myth of the 'Blitz Spirit' during the war

THE "BLITZ Spirit" was always a propaganda ploy.

It is the mythology of a peculiar British cult. Vera Lynn singing, Spitfires flying over Dover piloted by nice public school boys, and Dad's Army as a documentary.

The myth was created at the time of the Second World War.

>>Pages 10&11

LABOUR



After Corbyn—why couldn't he beat capital?

WITH THE winner of the Labour leadership contest set to be announced on Saturday, it raises big questions about why Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour left were defeated.

We look at his impact—and at what happens when Labour's methods are used to win change.

>>Pages 14&15 & 18

AUSTERITY

New UC benefit claims soar after savage job cuts

NEARLY HALF a million people put in claims for Universal Credit (UC) in a nine-day period as the coronavirus crisis hit.

It underlines how the Tory pledge to pay 80 percent of some workers' wages isn't enough to protect people.

>>Page 17

Hospitals out of protective kit ● Not enough beds, equipment or workers ● Ministers lied about testing



THE THINGS THEY SAY

'I shook hands with everybody'

Boris Johnson before it was confirmed he has coronavirus

'Thoughts and prayers of whole nation with @BorisJohnson'

Former Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt on Twitter. The 'whole nation'?

'Very best wishes to the Prime Minister and his family'

Shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth shows some national unity

'Misunderstandings'

Sports Direct's Mike Ashley explains away his attempts to keep shops open

'People are going to have to choose what they want to die from, hunger or the virus'

Head of Airbus contractor Derichebourg Aeronautics Services Pascal Lannette urges French workers to resume production

'Suspend their studies'

Advice from York university for students who are too poor to have IT equipment and internet access to study offsite

Government knew the NHS could not cope with the virus

THE NHS failed a test of its ability to withstand a major pandemic more than three years ago but the results were not made public.

The three-day practice run across the government found Britain would be quickly overwhelmed by an outbreak.

It highlighted a shortage of personal protective equipment, morgue capacity and critical care beds.

The test—codenamed Exercise Cygnus—was carried out in October 2016. But its findings were deemed too sensitive to be made public.

The results of the study were said to have prompted ministers to draft emergency legislation that formed the basis of the wideranging Coronavirus Bill that was rushed through the Commons last week.

One former senior



THE GOVERNMENT knew the NHS wouldn't cope with a pandemic

government source told the Sunday Telegraph newspaper, "There has been a reluctance to put Cygnus out in the public domain because frankly it would terrify people."

"It's right to say that the NHS was stretched beyond breaking point [by Cygnus]."

"People might say we have blood on our hands but the fact is that it's always easier to manage the last outbreak than the one coming down

the track." More than 1,000 organisations took part in the 2016 exercise.

NHS trusts, the military and doctors' associations were asked to show how they would cope with a major influenza outbreak.

The report used modelling by the same Imperial College London team whose work is now being used to track the Covid-19 outbreak. It is said to have found significant gaps

in the NHS's "surge capacity", while mortuaries were rapidly overwhelmed because of a lack of doctors able to certify causes of death.

Questions were also raised about the supply of life-saving protective equipment for doctors and nurses, sources told the paper.

Speaking about the operation in a 2016 speech—in one of few public references to the exercise—then-chief medical officer Dame Sally Davies said, "We've just had in the UK a three-day exercise on flu on a pandemic that killed a lot of people."

"It became clear that we could not cope with the excess bodies, for instance. It becomes very worrying about the deaths, and what that will do to society as you start to get all those deaths, [including] the economic impact."



PIGS OF THE WEEK



Chalking up the fines

#1 'There will be anarchy'

THE MET Police threatened to fine a bakery boss £80 for criminal damage after she put temporary lines outside her shop to keep her customers safe from coronavirus.

The incident took place outside the Grodzinski bakery in Edgware, north west London. The officer told the woman that she had graffitied the pavement.

The woman said, "This is not graffiti, it's chalk, it washes off. So you would rather all my customers don't stand two metres apart?"

The officer replied, "It's still a criminal offence. The law is the law and it doesn't change because of what is happening."

"There would be anarchy in the world."



That'll teach it

#2 Boys in blue pollute pool

POLICE have dyed the normally bright blue water of a beauty spot in Buxton black, in a bid to deter people from gathering there.

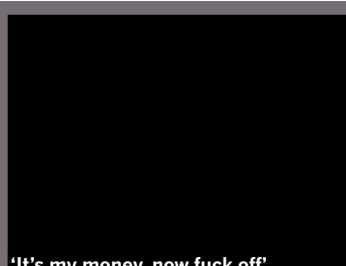
The disused quarry at Harpur Hill was considered too picturesque by plods.

So to prevent us not all coming together they added black ink saying, "We have attended the location this morning and used water dye to make the water look less appealing."

CELEBRITY CHEF wanker of the week award goes to Gordon Ramsay.

Ramsay laid off more than 500 of his staff. Axed employees took to social media to blast Gordon Ramsay Restaurants for ending their contracts out of the blue.

Staff have been told by email they will get paid up until 17 April, but say there is no guarantee their job will still be available. Ramsay is "worth" £185 million.



'It's my money, now fuck off'

US BILLIONAIRE hedge fund manager Bill Ackman has made \$2.6 billion out of the coronavirus crisis. Ackman had bet that the outbreak would cause a market crash.

Did his claims that "hell is coming" on national TV help to stoke the market panic?

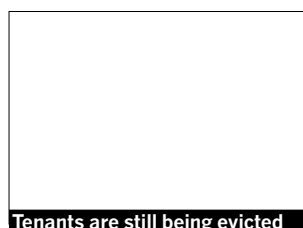
Evictions are on the rise despite Tories' pledge

AN EVICTIONS firm says it is taking on extra staff to kick out "a record number of tenants".

The coronavirus legislation leaves up to 20,000 renters at risk of losing their homes because it is not backdated.

Instead, a bar on court proceedings only kicked in last week. And landlords can still inform tenants of an intention to evict them after late June. This forces many to prepare to move out.

One email from a property management company read, "We own a business which has a department where we evict private and commercial tenants when court orders



Tenants are still being evicted

have been gained. We are evicting a record number of both private and commercial tenants.

"We have appointed new agents to cope with the rapid increase in evictions."

"Estate agents, property management agents and landlords are very keen to evict tenants as they need the rent paid in full during these difficult times."

'Kink community' on Tory fetish for cuts

A MEDICAL fetish firm says it has donated its entire stock of disposable scrubs to an NHS hospital that was "desperate" for supplies.

In a thread posted on Twitter, MedFetUK wrote, "We have been contacted this week by representatives of NHS procurement all over the country, trying to source basic protective equipment and clothing."

"When we, a tiny company set up to serve a small section of the kink community, find ourselves being sought out as a last-resort supplier to our National Health Service in a time of crisis, something is



MedfetUK merchandise

seriously wrong. In fact, it's scandalous.

"This is the result of a decade of chronic underfunding and cuts which has left the NHS barely able to cope under normal circumstances, much less when faced with the onslaught of a global pandemic."

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Tories' failure to test for virus will cost more lives

by TOMÁŠ TENGELY-EVANS

THE TORIES are trying to hide their responsibility for the coronavirus crisis as the number of patients rises by 1,000 a day.

The death toll had already reached 1,415 by Monday evening and the number of cases grew to more than 22,000. Chief Scientific Officer Sir Patrick Vallance warned that the situation will “get worse over the next few weeks”.

The Tory government is blaming everything apart from its own “business as usual” policies.

It squandered four weeks when it could have been suppressing the virus through mass testing, tracing and shutting down non-essential parts of the economy.

Ministers have been caught out lying about reaching their target of 25,000 tests by mid to late April.

Michael Gove claimed on Sunday that he couldn't “give the exact percentage” but that the number was “significant”. He then quickly said that 10,000 tests for the virus were being administered.

But on Monday Public Health England (PHE) officials said that only 8,278 tests were carried out on 4,908 people as of 9am on Sunday. This was a decrease from 9,114 tests as of 9am last Saturday.

Reliable

The home testing kits ordered by the Tories might also not be as reliable as standard tests.

The PHE's lack of testing capacity in Britain is down to privatisation policies that broke up and shut hospital pathology departments in the 2000s.

Anthony Costello, a former director of the World Health Organisation (WHO), said additional mass testing could be made available through

TORIES ARE holding back testing

using other laboratories. He said, “We have 44 molecular virology labs in the UK.

“If they were each doing 400 tests a day we would be up to Germany levels of testing.”

But he added that PHE had been “slow” to allow other labs to test.

Health and social care services—hammered by a decade of Tory austerity—are already reeling under the pressure.

Alan Hoskins, director of procurement and commercial services at NHS South of England, said he was

“losing the will to live” on Sunday. His now deleted tweet came after he was unable to get hold of medical gowns.

Hospitals are unable to discharge people to care homes because of the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Danny Thorpe, Labour leader of Greenwich council in south east London, had to issue a public appeal for donations of gloves, goggles and masks last Thursday.

He said, “I was driving round schools in my borough to get head

teachers to open them for plastic gloves.

“We had enough equipment that we generated to support the discharge of 8 patients.”

Thorpe added that a delivery by the British Army “did not include any glove or eye protection”.

The Tories have blood on their hands.



What's your story?

Email with your ideas
reports@socialistworker.co.uk

Outsourcers won't pay

A TOP boss at Amey, one of Britain's biggest outsourcing companies, told workers he believes coronavirus is “less severe” than normal flu.

He says this justifies not paying special sickness benefits.

Simon Schumann-Davies told a GMB union negotiator, “Ultimately it remains a disease like many others.

“At the end of this current crisis, we must continue to have a viable business.”

“To this end, we are applying exactly the same rules regarding sickness benefit as we would for any other

condition in that we will be paying contractual entitlement.”

The GMB was negotiating on behalf of refuse collectors in the London borough of Ealing, where the company has the waste contract.

Despite being classed as key workers by the government, the rubbish collectors are

being offered only the contractual minimum if they fall ill. In many cases that is the statutory sick pay of £94.25 a week.

Amey has a £3.2 billion turnover with contracts in councils and prisons.

Supermarket firm Lidl is also refusing to pay full wages to self-isolating workers.

Abortion law changes do not go far enough

RULES RELAXING access to abortion aren't enough to protect women in the pandemic.

The Department of Health has said that women in England can take abortion pills at home—a move that pro-choice campaigners have argued for over many years.

That's a positive change. But after a week of mixed messages, the department said that the “measure will be on a temporary basis and must follow a

Fighting for rights

telephone or e-consultation with a doctor”.

The rule changes relate to early-term medical abortions, which involve taking two tablets.

Normally, women need to get the permission of two doctors and have to take the first pill at a clinic, and the second one at home.

But now up until the tenth week of pregnancy and after an online consultation with a doctor, women will have the abortion pills sent to them in the post.

The rule changes don't go far enough to protect the rights of tens of thousands of women who will need to access abortion services during the lockdown.

But they do show that it's possible to easily extend reproductive rights

Women in Scotland and Wales have received no information about what the coronavirus crisis means for their abortion, as Socialist Worker went to press.

And women in Northern Ireland still face journeys hundreds of miles long to access abortion services in England or Wales, increasing their exposure to coronavirus.

Women should have full control over their own bodies and their own lives.
Sarah Bates

Socialist Worker

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Send 'start' to the number



Crucial care services are withdrawn by councils

Thousands of vulnerable people face going without the care they need says **Tomáš Tengely-Evans**

COUNCILS AND care bosses are trying to withdraw support for vulnerable people who have been asked to self-isolate.

It comes after the Coronavirus Act watered-down local authorities' duty of care to adults and children.

Those under threat include some of the 1.5 million older and ill people who have been instructed not to leave their house for the next 12 weeks.

Janet, who lives in Hackney in east London, relies on daily visits from care workers.

She has terminal cancer and has recently been diagnosed with ataxia—a degenerative condition that affects people's coordination and balance.

Janet told Socialist Worker she was "so shocked" when she got a phone call from care bosses last Tuesday. "They phoned up and asked me if I could manage on my own during the crisis," she said.

"They didn't ask me if I had family members or friends that could help.

"It didn't hit me until afterwards, as far as they were aware, I would have been on my own for the next 12 weeks."

Argue

Janet refused to give up her care and has kept it "for now at least", but the company tried to argue her down.

She explained, "When I said I couldn't even prepare my own vegetables, she said, 'Couldn't you get ready meals?'."

"How am I supposed to stay indoors and stay healthy like that?"

"There are things I cannot do, my family is scattered around the country and my friends are in the same position as me."

Janet's case makes a mockery of the Tories' claim that councils, friendly neighbours and the internet would help the

BACK STORY

The Tories promised that vulnerable people would be looked after during the outbreak

● But the Coronavirus Act, rushed through parliament last week made it easier for them to be neglected

● The act suspended councils' duty to meet the eligible needs of disabled people and their carers

● Now one person who relies on care support has told Socialist Worker how her care company tried to abandon her

1.5 million vulnerable with shopping.

A decade of budget cuts to local authority budgets and privatisation has hammered social care services.

That's why the Tories' coronavirus legislation brought in dangerous changes to the Care Act 2014.

Janet fears that she wouldn't get the care package back after the coronavirus crisis.

She said, "They should be expanding care now because so many more people will need it, not trying to stop it. And afterwards, would you get the care back if you have had friends to look after you for 12 weeks?"

Meanwhile, some privatised care homes refused to take patients who should have been discharged from hospitals.

Care bosses say they do not want to expose elderly people to the risk of coronavirus from people who have not been tested.

Mass testing for coronavirus, proper protective clothing for care home staff, and care homes for people who have been discharged could help solve the problem.

That means kicking out privatisers and dumping the fragmented, privatised care system.

Health and social care services need a huge injection of cash so it's possible to meet everyone's needs.



DISABLED PEOPLE face yet more attacks as a result of the Tory Coronavirus Act

Tories abandon homeless people despite promises to give shelter

CONFLICTING ADVICE from the Tory government is resulting in homeless people being at heightened risk of contracting coronavirus.

Central government issued a 48-hour warning to local councils to house all rough sleepers by Sunday of last week.

But Boris Johnson's cabinet issued no extra funding to facilitate this.

This will leave already vulnerable people in increasingly desperate situations.

Paul Atherton is a homeless man who until this week had been sleeping in Terminal 5 of Heathrow Airport.

He said rough sleepers in the airport had been evicted from the building, without any advice about where to go next.

"The likelihood of anyone being housed before the weekend is infinitesimally small," he said.

But as the Tories issued press releases boasting about their unprecedented action about rough sleeping, other policies were turfing homeless people

hours' notice to find alternative accommodation for our clients.

"One was 84 years old. Luckily we managed to find other rooms by the skin of our teeth. This is only week one."

Travelodge bosses blamed their decision on "government guidance", despite guidelines saying that hotels housing homeless families should remain open.

Those currently homeless aren't the only ones risking evictions, as Tory policy doesn't go far enough to protect private renters.

Robert Jenrick, Tory housing minister, has said the new Coronavirus Bill includes a "complete ban" on evictions for private renters while the pandemic is ongoing.

But the new legislation actually just bans evictions where a notice period is less than three months.

And the bill also doesn't protect around 20,000 people who have eviction cases currently going through the legal process.

Jenrick—under pressure over evictions

out on the street. Many homeless people are temporarily housed by local authorities in budget hotels and Bed and Breakfasts.

But the order to close hotels on Monday last week meant vulnerable families were evicted—some at just a few hours' notice.

A council housing worker in Spelthorne, Surrey, tweeted, "Travelodge gave us four

Food sent to primary school children in Bristol

PICTURE: PETER OVERTON

Poor quality food sent to children on free meals

THERE WAS fury last week over the poor quality of food being sent to some children who receive free school meals.

Bristol primary school head teacher Peter Overton tweeted a picture of what was being sent to children from his school.

It included a loaf of bread, a packet of low-quality butter, crisps, cheese, snacks and fruit—and was supposed to last a week.

Overton described the package as "shameful" adding

that the school paid £11 to a contractor for each one.

It's a disgrace that poor children are being given such meagre supplies. But some are receiving nothing at all.

One parent in Leeds told Socialist Worker their son usually receives free school meals but had received nothing since schools closed.

The council there says it is delivering packed lunches to children whose parents have registered to receive

them. "I haven't heard anything," said the parent. "If you had to register for it, surely they would have told everyone?" And an NEU union member in London said the system for ensuring children are fed is in "chaos".

The government claimed children on free school meals would receive food or vouchers when schools closed. It claimed to be looking out for the most vulnerable.

But once again, the claims don't quite match the reality.

Library workers take action against unsafe conditions

COUNCIL workers in Tower Hamlets, east London, forced the closure of library hubs in the borough after bosses played fast and loose with safety measures.

Workers across seven "Idea Stores" in the borough—said they wouldn't come back to work because bosses were ignoring health advice.

Matt, an idea store worker and Unison union rep, told Socialist Worker that workers felt "absolute anger and hatred at the bosses."

"There's a complete and utter contempt that they kept opening stores despite the threat to the health

of the staff." The bosses have even told workers they weren't allowed to wear face masks, because "they didn't work".

Matt said, "Hand washing stations were installed in buildings—but without any hand fluid.

Computers weren't being cleaned, and different people were using them every hour.

Frustrated by the lack of the action from the top, Idea Store workers took matters into their own hands.

On Monday around 60 workers signed a letter declaring that because the council hadn't put in the minimum

requirements for work, they wouldn't be returning to Idea Stores the next day.

"They said to HR that they wouldn't be coming back in because their buildings aren't safe," said Matt.

He added, "Now we have to fight to make sure that those of us that are fit, and want to help, have the equipment to do it at our own homes.

"We could be phoning vulnerable people, setting up story times online.

"We can do all that, but we're not going to be told we can do them in unsafe buildings."

Workers' names have been changed

Socialist Worker
WHAT WE THINK

VIRUS SHOWS CAPITALIST SYSTEM FAILS MILLIONS

THE CORONAVIRUS crisis has exposed capitalism as a brutal and inhumane system that fails to meet people's most basic needs.

Tens of thousands of people will die from Covid-19 because the system refuses to provide enough equipment, care and medication to save them.

Millions more will suffer extreme poverty, starvation and other horrors because governments fail to give them the support they need.

But states can always find resources to defend the system.

In South Africa, cops have fired rubber bullets at people queuing outside supermarkets. In Kenya, commuters have faced police tear gas. In France, cops had issued 38,994 fines after just five days of lockdown and arrested hundreds. Britain is heading in the same direction.

And during the crisis, the Tories drew up plans to loan other countries £1 billion of our money so they can keep buying British arms.

More than half a million people are going without while trying to claim the measly Universal Credit

benefit. It would cost £104 billion for the government to give every adult in Britain £2,000.

There's more than enough money to do that. Last year's Sunday Times Rich List showed that the richest 1,000 people in Britain are worth £771 billion.

And these are desperate times when people need money in their pockets now.

But those at the top want to keep "business as usual" as much as possible.

There are over 100,000 empty hotel rooms in Las Vegas in the US. Yet crowds of homeless people are being forced to sleep in a car park.

Hundreds of homeless people

“Millions more will suffer but states always find money to defend the system

had been thrown out of a 500-bed shelter after one person tested positive for coronavirus.

It can seem that governments are intervening in ways that would have previously seemed unimaginable.

The Tories have pledged to underwrite some wages of some workers who are laid off due to the crisis. But lots of people will get nothing.

And their measures are still geared towards helping the rich.

So their suspension of rail franchises is aimed at protecting the profits of private rail firms, by saving them from collapse.

Across the world, states have thrown trillions at the banks during the coronavirus crisis.

There are obscene amounts of wealth in the world and the rich keep grabbing more of it.

The truth is that wealth isn't theirs—it's ours.

The capitalist system is based on bosses exploiting workers, paying them less than the value of their work and keeping the extra as profit.

We need to take it back, scrap their rotten system and fight for a world run by ordinary people for ordinary people.

A WARNING FROM HUNGARY

HUNGARY'S government effectively declared itself a dictatorship on Monday under the guise of combating coronavirus.

Its parliament voted to allow the government—run by the far right Viktor Orban and his Fidesz party—to rule by decree.

That means it can do what it likes without having to go through parliament.

All by-elections and referendums have been suspended. Orban said the government

would now have the powers needed to tackle the virus.

Anyone who promotes "distorted facts" that may "alarm or agitate" the public faces prison for up to five years.

What's more, there's no time limit on the new powers. It's effectively up to the government to decide when—or if—it gives them up.

It should be a warning of the dangers of letting governments use coronavirus to bring in sweeping new powers. In Britain, the Tories

haven't gone as far as their friend Orban.

But their Coronavirus Act has given the cops more powers to stop, harass and detain people. Spooks have more freedom to access people's private data.

And all this went through with barely a peep of opposition. Labour was happy just to ask for a six-month review of the powers.

But once a government has won the argument for new laws, it's far easier for them to argue to keep them.

Breakfast in



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Care workers need tests and PPE

ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS



Crisis exposes myth of a progressive EU

THE CORONAVIRUS crisis has exposed political leaders as wanting. The systematic bungling by Boris Johnson's government is summed up by the fact that he, his health secretary and the chief medical adviser have all tested positive for the virus.

Donald Trump's brutish ignorance and scapegoating politics is exceeded only in callous incompetence by his Brazilian twin Jair Bolsonaro. But these clown kings of contemporary right wing politics shouldn't draw attention away from the dreadful performance of more mainstream neoliberal institutions.

When Trump captured the White House, the European Union (EU) deluded itself that it might fill the gap. Its dominant political figure, German chancellor Angela Merkel, was portrayed the "real leader of the free world". But yet again the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the EU too.

The EU supposedly seeks an "ever closer union" culminating in a federal European state comparable to the US.

But although it has some transnational institutions, notably the European Central Bank and the European Commission, it remains a cartel of capitalist nation states. In this the more powerful, above all Germany and France, call the shots.

Because of this, the EU's fumbling of the pandemic has followed exactly the same path as it took during the global financial crisis.

First, national governments make the immediate emergency response. They have considerably more resources and legitimacy than EU institutions, so they decide the lockdowns. This means the response has been piecemeal and uneven. Both Sweden and the Netherlands have avoided full lockdowns and are pursuing versions of Johnson's discredited "herd immunity" strategy.

Worse still, it's every state for itself. Early in March Italy appealed for international help. There was no response from the rest of the EU. Only China offered medical supplies and expertise. There is an unconfirmed story that some of these supplies were seized en route westwards by the Czech Republic. So much for the "European solidarity" the EU likes to boast about.

Uncertainty

Secondly, there is the economic policy response. There seems to be a consensus among economists that we are heading for an economic contraction more severe than the Great Recession of 2008-9.

Nouriel Roubini, one of the few to predict the global financial crisis, is warning of a "Greater Depression" worse even than that in the 1930s. The main uncertainty concerns how long this catastrophe will last.

This is why governments are throwing as much money as they can at their economies. Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak has so far unveiled four successive emergency packages.

They may lead to a budget deficit, where some spending has to be covered by borrowing, of £200 billion in the next financial year. That compares to £25.5 billion in 2018-19.

Germany's coalition government has introduced a supplementary budget of over £318 billion, the equivalent of 10 percent of national income. Germany has given itself the right to ignore its own economically illiterate "black zero" rule banning budget deficits, which it imposed on the Eurozone.

Meanwhile Italy and other weaker member states have their hands tied by measures such as the 2012 Fiscal Pact.

This gives the European Commission the power to police national budgets and limit government borrowing. It is the ugly legacy of the Eurozone crisis, when austerity was forced on Greece, Ireland, Spain, and Portugal.

There was the same line-up at last week's European Council—the supreme EU decision-making body. An alliance of mainly southern states advocated the introduction of "coronabonds" that would allow joint borrowing by EU governments.

This was blocked by the so-called "Hanseatic League" of prosperous northern member states backed by Merkel.

Once again the neoliberal cult of sound money has triumphed in an economic emergency. No wonder Yanis Varoufakis, the left wing former finance minister of Greece, reacted, "I don't think the EU is capable of doing anything to us other than harm."

"I opposed Brexit but I have the conclusion that the British did the right thing, even if they did it for the wrong reason."

UNITE UNION leader Len McCluskey hopes to do deals with the Tories

We need action, not dodgy deals, from union leaders

by NICK CLARK

ACTION BY workers has shown the type of resistance that's possible against bosses who force them to work in unsafe conditions during the coronavirus outbreak.

Some 500 workers at a warehouse near Barnsley, South Yorkshire, walked out last Saturday. The strikers said bosses at online clothes shop Asos were forcing them to work too close together.

They claimed they were taken to work on crowded buses and that there was not enough hand sanitiser.

They also said they had to work just three feet, or roughly a metre, apart from each other.

Government guidelines say people should only travel for essential work, and should stay two metres apart.

Impossible

One worker said, "The bosses said online shopping should be encouraged. But it's almost impossible to socially distance. There's a minimum of 500 people there."

"I'm sat three feet from somebody. There's somebody else three feet away from me in another direction."

Another worker said bosses had stopped their pay while they stayed off in isolation because they live with someone considered at "high risk".

Meanwhile around 1,000 workers at a poultry factory

in Portadown, Northern Ireland, struck on Wednesday of last week. They walked out for 15 minutes complaining that they were forced to work too close together.

Many workers in Britain face similar conditions.

Gary Smith works at a major Royal Mail sorting office and distribution hub.

He said some workers have refused to come to work on

the crowded minibuses laid on by bosses. He added that conditions in the mail centre were also unsafe.

"There's not enough personal protective equipment such as hand sanitiser," he told Socialist Worker.

"And some of the sorting machines require three people to operate standing next to each other."

Dave Ward, general

secretary of the CWU union, said he would back any Royal Mail worker who refused to work over safety.

Yet in a union where workers are known for striking unofficially, Ward said, "I want to make it clear that we are not calling for unofficial action."

He said this was because the union faced a "balancing act" between acting to protect workers' safety and to "protect the industry and sustain the businesses that they work in".

Ward added that union leaders he'd spoken to on a TUC union federation conference call took the same attitude.

Partnership

Union leaders have congratulated themselves that working in partnership with the government and the bosses has given them some influence.

Unite union leader Len McCluskey gave an interview to the Sunday Times newspaper last week. He said he hoped the crisis would put an end to trade unions being seen "as the enemy within".

Yet while union leaders celebrate their deals with the Tories, bosses get away with forcing people to work unsafely—with no challenge from union leaders.

Labour backs Tories

THE LABOUR Party has also shied away from challenging the Tories and the bosses over coronavirus.

In a recent article for the Labourist website, leadership candidate Rebecca Long-Bailey pointed to some problems workers face as a result of the lockdown.

"Millions who are sick, self-isolating or who have seen work dry up now face immediate hardship and uncertainty over their jobs, homes and incomes," she wrote.

Yet she stopped short of demanding government action against bosses—

such as shutting down companies that force people to work and guaranteeing workers' pay.

Overall Labour has backed the Tory government's approach to the coronavirus outbreak, only offering mild criticisms about aspects of its policies.

Its call for "action" during the crisis has focused on organising self-help groups to distribute food and support to people in isolation. But with no challenge to the Tories, this "community" spirit risks being co-opted by the government—and letting it off the hook.



Rebecca Long-Bailey



Got a story?

Email ideas to reports@socialistworker.co.uk

Health workers die in lack of equipment ‘national scandal’

Weeks after the government insisted the shortage of personal protective equipment was being resolved, doctors and nurses are getting ill, and some die because they still can’t get it

THE FIRST health workers in Britain have died due to coronavirus in a sign of the horrors to come for a woefully underfunded NHS.

Amged el-Hawrani, a doctor based in Leicestershire, died after testing positive for Covid-19 at the weekend. His case follows the deaths of London-based surgeon Adil el-Tayar and Essex GP Habib Zaidi.

Meanwhile, West Midlands nurse Areema Nasreen was fighting for her life in intensive care after contracting coronavirus.

Health workers fear that more of their colleagues will die without the proper personal protective equipment (PPE).

Abebi, a health care assistant at the Whittington Hospital in north London, says workers are “very worried” about workplace conditions.

“You see on the TV people wearing the full clothing, but that’s just not the case for us,” she told Socialist Worker.

“We wear just the plastic aprons, gloves and single use masks.”

Abebi said the lack of proper PPE meant “some people are not coming” to work because they fear catching the virus or because they are self-isolating.

Financially

“It’s very, very tough at the minute,” she added. “Some people don’t even go on a break during their shift.”

“It’s not enough to have clapping for health workers, the government should help to relieve us financially.”

“They should check all the staff for coronavirus.”

Outrage forced the Tories to announce limited testing for frontline health workers.

But testing will be reserved for staff who display symptoms of coronavirus or who live with people who have symptoms. This is a far cry from the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) mantra of, “Test, test, test,” to stop the spread of the virus.

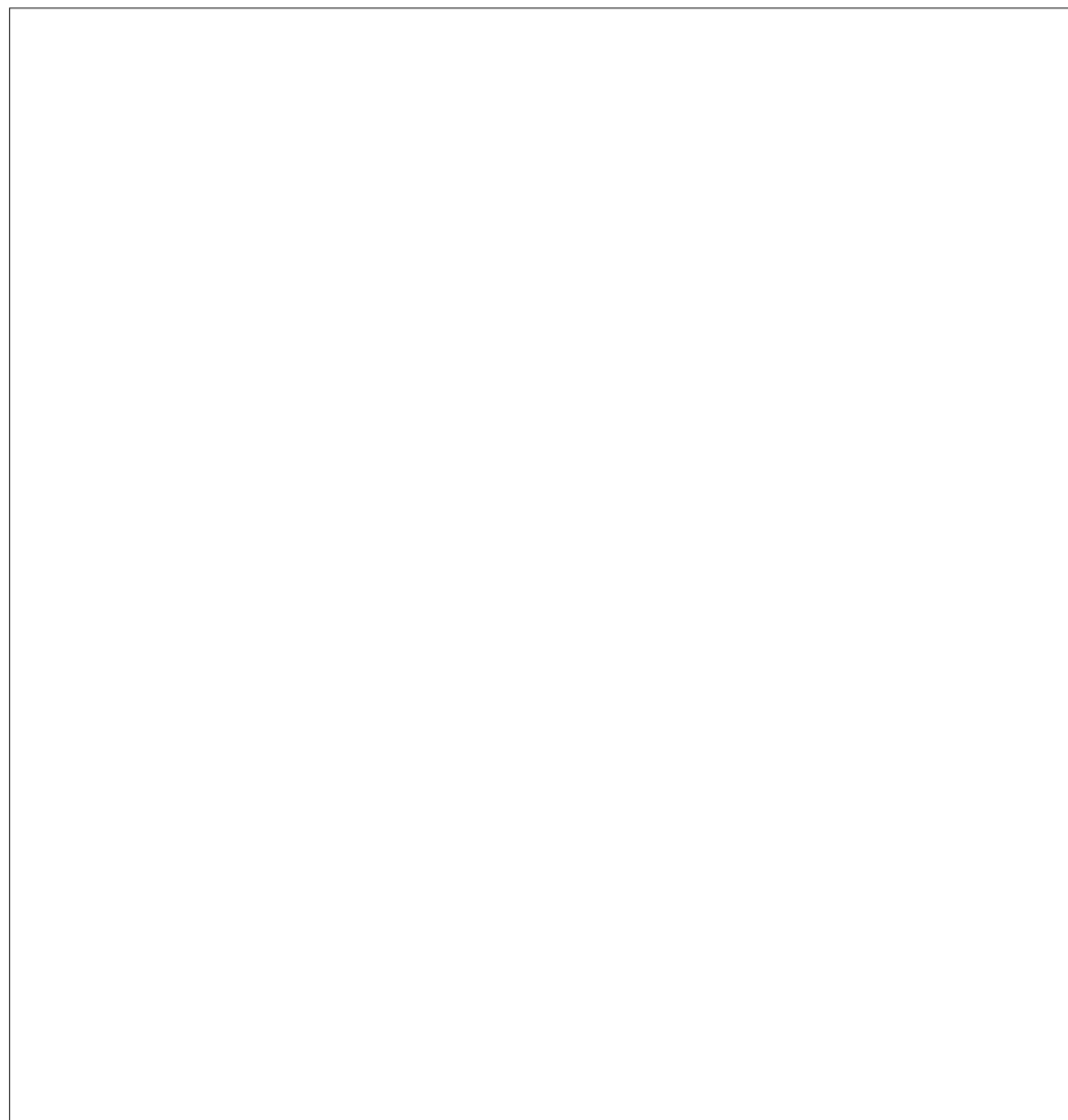
Richard Horton, editor of The Lancet medical journal, slammed the Tory government’s coronavirus strategy as “nothing short of a national scandal”.

“We should not be in this position,” he said. “We knew in the last week of January that this was coming.”

“We then wasted February when we could have acted, could have got personal protective equipment ready and disseminated.”

Horton singled out the problem of equipping workers with the correct PPE.

“I’m hearing that not only is PPE not available, it’s the wrong kind of



DR ADIL el-Tayar, Dr Amged el-Hawrani, nurse Areema Nasreen and Dr Habib Zaidi all hit by Covid-19

PPE and what we have isn’t even WHO standard,” he said.

“The hypocrisy of clapping NHS workers and yet the government not supporting them to go into that frontline is tragic and it was preventable.”

Unions have been far too slow to demand proper PPE and mass testing, fearing they would lose their seats at the top table alongside bosses and ministers.

But growing demands from rank and file workers to demand higher quality masks and clothing in trusts could spur the unions into action.

Abebi is a pseudonym



On other pages...
The myth of the ‘Blitz Spirit’
>>Pages 10&11

VENTILATORS

Deadly shortage threatens care

HOSPITALS HAVE started rationing ventilators for patients as the coronavirus death toll rises.

The NHS has 8,000 ventilators, but it’s predicted to need at least 30,000 to treat people with acute respiratory difficulties caused by the virus.

The lack of ventilators is another example of how Tory policy left the NHS exposed to the pandemic.

Rival firms are busy competing for contracts to boost their profits.

Several companies have said their offers to supply ventilators were ignored in recent weeks. Specialist makers say that they have been sidelined in favour of



NOT ENOUGH ventilators for NHS

big-name manufacturers with unproven models.

Dyson this week said it had received a government order for 10,000 ventilators designed from scratch, subject to passing regulatory tests.

A separate proposal could have supplied the NHS with as many as 25,000 ventilators from China. It similarly went unanswered until it was too late, according to the two companies behind it.

Firms Direct Access and Topland General Trading say they first contacted officials on 16 March with a plan to manufacture 5,000 machines a week.

“Had quicker action been taken then, we would now have supplied up to 15,000 ventilators with a further delivery of 10,000 within the next two weeks,” said Topland owner Andy Faulkner.

Now a backlog of orders mean that it will take the firm two to three months to provide a similar number of ventilators.

This scandal again shows how the anarchy of the market cannot deal with the coronavirus crisis.

Privatising the Nightingale

THE TORIES didn’t waste any time to use a makeshift NHS hospital in east London to hand out money to big business.

They are building Nightingale hospital in the Excel conference centre in Canning Town, with plans for around ten other sites across Britain, including in Birmingham and Manchester.

One of the firms that has been given a contract is outsourcing giant ISS. At nearby Lewisham hospital in south east

London, the firm still hasn’t coughed up unpaid wages to some of the lowest-paid support staff weeks after the payments were due.

Some cleaners, domestics and porters were not paid properly on 27 February and walked out unofficially when this wasn’t rectified in March.

It’s time to kick out the privatisers, scrap the whole “internal market” in the NHS and spend the money on workers, patients and equipment.



Millions fear starvation after India shutdown

THE INDIAN government's attempts to lock down over a billion people are collapsing after only a few days.

Prime minister Narendra Modi last week ordered the country be shutdown for 21 days in a bid to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The hard right prime minister suggested that people “take inspiration from frontline soldiers” and show resolve in tough times.

But by last Saturday hundreds of thousands of workers in the main cities were trying to return to their villages across the country fearing they would starve during the quarantine period.

Most of those fleeing are day labourers, living a hand to mouth existence.

With the economy shut down and little or no welfare provision in place, many had decided to try to make it home.

Bus stations were swamped by thousands of people who upon finding there were no buses decided to try and walk home—even if home is hundreds of miles away.

Ram Nivas Yadav, an auto-rickshaw driver in Delhi, told reporters, “My landlord wants the rent at the beginning of every month, without fail.

“He will simply throw me out if I don’t pay,”

He added, “I used to earn 400-500 rupees (£4-£5) per day, but now I can’t earn anything because of the lockdown.

“I won’t be able to eat anything after three to four days.”

A large government disaster fund has been set up.

But the hollowing out of the state under successive right and centre right governments means there are few ways of ensuring people are fed in a time of crisis.

That’s why Modi has also demanded that state governments use physical force to stop the movement of people.

Heavily armed troops have placed roadblocks on all the main exits from the cities.

This is becoming a new source of tension. In the central state of Madhya Pradesh, where Modi’s BJP

DESERTED STREETS in Bangalore

party won most seats in this year’s election, a police officer caused outrage when she attacked a fleeing worker.

Pinning him to the floor, she wrote “I’ve violated lockdown, stay away from me” on his forehead.

And, in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh several thousand

labourers are now stranded at a checkpoint, unable to return home to tend the red chili harvest.

With no food or water, they are left in limbo with the desolate city behind them, while their families wait desperately for them to return.

India currently has a relatively low level of infections, with less

than a thousand cases and 25 deaths.

Some medical professionals predict a large rise in cases that could devastate the country.

But widespread distrust of politicians and the state means that many millions of people fear starvation more than the coronavirus.

Strikes and repression spread across the African continent

ZIMBABWE

NURSES AND doctors in Zimbabwe in southern Africa began a strike last week to protest against the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association spokesperson Tapiwa Zvakada said doctors won’t resume work until the government provides them proper protective gear they need while treating patients.

“There is a difference between heroism and committing suicide,” said Zvakada. “Let PPEs be available first and then we will be able to offer our services and help our patients.”

Nurses in the public hospitals who have also joined the strike said the health ministry have not responded to previous requests for PPE.

The Zimbabwe Professional Nurses Union said in a statement, “It seems our concern is not getting the urgency it deserves. So in that



People in Kenya run from the police

regard all nurses are withdrawing their services with immediate effect until there is genuine action taken by the employer.”

The present emergency has accelerated longer term issues.

Five months ago, during a previous strike, senior doctors described the situation at the country’s hospitals as a “silent genocide.”

They said doctors are forced to work without basics such as bandages, gloves, and syringes.

KENYA

POLICE FIRED tear gas at a crowd of Kenyan ferry commuters as the country’s first days of a coronavirus curfew began last week.

Amnesty International Kenya and 19 other human rights groups said they were “horrified by excessive use of police force” ahead of the curfew that began last Friday night.

“We continue to receive testimonies from victims, eyewitnesses and video footage

showing police gleefully assaulting members of the public in other parts of the country.”

The tear gas caused hundreds of people trying to reach a ferry in the port city of Mombasa ahead of the overnight curfew to touch their faces as they vomited, spat and wiped away tears. This increases the chance of the virus’s spread, the rights groups said.

SOUTH AFRICA

POLICE ASSAULTED homeless people in Johannesburg and hit some with batons minutes after a three-week lockdown began last Friday. They also fired rubber bullets at shoppers queuing outside a supermarket.

On Saturday the military raided a large workers’ hostel in Alexandra township near Johannesburg for alleged failure to apply the lockdown. At least 55 people across the country were arrested.

In a move that could have huge consequences, the government has

said it is looking to “depopulate” 29 large informal settlements where tens of thousands of people live.

The department of human settlements says it is moving people to areas where they will have better facilities.

But shack dwellers movement Abahlali baseMjondolo says that brutal evictions are being carried out without any concern for the residents.

“The government tells us that we must all stay inside our homes during this health crisis and yet, at the same time, they are demolishing the homes of impoverished people” said the group.

“We are left with no choice but to continue to resist oppression during this crisis.

“We will organise our resistance in the safest possible way, but we will resist. People whose homes have been destroyed now have no other choice than to reoccupy and to rebuild.”

Food firms hike prices

AS A parent having to homeschool, one of my main concerns is keeping our family fed.

Local supermarkets are still crowded, and running the risks of infection so we rely very much on our local shop at the end of the road.

I have found that large bags of potatoes are being split into bags containing four potatoes each for a price of over one pound.

That represents, I believe, a 400 percent price hike. Onions were the same.

As far as I know it is illegal to do this with packaged goods as they are sold for a particular price per package.

I phoned the local MP John Penrose, who is a Tory. His assistant told me there had been many such complaints, but didn't say what they are going to do about it.

This cannot be attributed to "panic buying". That is not the problem. It is a political problem.

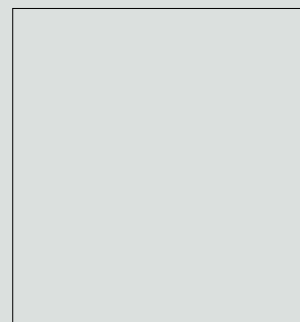
Frances Laing
North Somerset

Where are the unions?

HAVE I missed something in all the news about Covid-19 and the lack of equipment for workers in health and care?

Where are the trade union leaders? Are they all hoping for a nice meeting with beer and sandwiches with a Tory government to sort it out?

While their members are at risk from lack of



TUC leader Frances O'Grady

protective clothing and sufficient equipment they seem to have been remarkable only in their silence.

They should be at least making outraged noises if not leading action on the front line.

Graeme Cumming
Prestwick

Crisis shows how education can be organised differently

AS A teacher, socialist and trade unionist I met the cancellation of Sats, GCSEs and A Levels with mixed feelings.

I have genuine sympathy for children who have been preparing long and hard for their tests and exams.

But the dirty little secret of our education system is that exams are fundamentally flawed.

If baseline testing for four year olds is reintroduced, the government will spend millions on a test which will fairly accurately tell us what month a child was born in.

The intensive training of students that some schools use for Sats and the more humane approach used by others means the data is unreliable.

A relentless focus on final exams tends to disadvantage working class students and students from ethnic minorities.

Judging schools on test data has narrowed the range of subjects in some schools. And focusing on grades has contributed to a growing mental health crisis among young people.

Students are turned into raw material for data collection at the cost of a broader and wider education.

The government is still finalising what it intends to do regarding students' final results. As teachers we are well placed to know what they are capable of at this point in their lives.

As long as teachers and support staff allow the Department for



Focusing on exams damages children

Education and Ofsted to set the agenda we will continue to do our students a disservice.

As I was writing this, a friend on Facebook asked whether after all this is over we want to go back to the way we were before.

We must organise for something far better.

Kieran Picken

Teacher and District Secretary Derby NEU (personal capacity)

● DURING MY many years in education, I've experienced some very odd days, fun days, joyous days, sad days, heartbreaking days, quirky days and celebratory days.

But I've never experienced anything quite like Monday last week in my school.

Students and staff very quickly became attuned to following social distancing policies, and the school's interpretation of them.

Pieces of tape on the floor

where there are queues. Labels on chairs so that gaps are maintained.

It was strange to guide students into toilets outside the dining room, two at a time, to wash their hands before entering (and after exiting), and have them comply almost to the letter.

But most surprising of all was the way staff almost instinctively started to distance themselves.

It just seemed to happen, almost as if it were a habit that had been in place for a lifetime.

But how strange it was to enter an almost empty school. To see more staff than students. More classrooms than pupils!

To hear nothing along so many of the corridors.

In the—few—classes, a lovely atmosphere. Very light. Pupils appeared to be very happy, and getting on with work. Taking everything in their stride.

But hanging over everything was a sense that we've never been here before, coupled with not knowing what it'll be like tomorrow, or next week, or in a month.

What if we don't return after Easter, or not until after the summer?

I say I've not experienced anything else like it.

But perhaps it was like my first day as a student teacher, not knowing what to expect. Only being surrounded by a school full of staff in the same boat.

A voyage of discovery. Let's plough on!

A school worker
Kirklees, Yorkshire

Just a thought...

Not safe on the railways

SAME FOR us on the railway in the north (No hand sanitiser, no social distancing, no protection, 25 March).

Sanitiser only arrived today. No alcohol content though so not too sure about how much use it will be.

We're still having to squeeze past passengers to do our jobs because they simply won't stay home.

Plus some of the trains we work make it impossible to stay away from passengers when we do our safety critical work. Not to mention the small space and recirculated air.

Jon Long
On Facebook

Royals are the wrong priority

SO PRINCE Charles can get tested but health workers putting themselves at risk every day to try and help others can't?

If you're a celebrity, rich or royalty this system will look after you.

If you're a vital worker depended on by millions you can be left to die.

Lin Froggett
Lincolnshire

Brutal reality about benefits

AM PUZZLED. Can someone explain how Universal Credit and sick pay were judged to be completely adequate and fair until those who hated those on benefits found they had to make a claim?

Denis Jordan
South Tyneside

Let's say no to neoliberalism

IN SOCIALIST Worker Alex Callinicos quotes The Telegraph's Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, "Boris Johnson must embrace socialism immediately to save the liberal free market."

That's what the bosses want. Stuff that.

No going back to their neoliberalism.

Sasha Simic
On Twitter

● CORONAVIRUS may herald the death of neoliberalism.

But usher in fascism by the back door.

Jed Platts
On Facebook

WE'RE TOLD we need the Blitz spirit. That incomparable time soon after the start of Second World War when Brits stood firm and united against the worst that Nazi Germany could hurl at our plucky people.

People helped each other, class distinctions blurred, and the royals visited London's bombed-out East End. We kept calm, we carried on, and England prevailed.

But the "Blitz spirit" was then, as now, a propaganda ploy. It is the mythology of a peculiar British cult. Vera Lynn singing, Spitfires flying over Dover piloted by nice public school boys, and Dad's Army as a documentary.

The myth was created at the time. Memorable images, such as a milkman delivering as usual and people borrowing books from bombed out libraries were the fake news of the day. And in fact when the King and Queen visited the East End they were booed.

Writer J B Priestley made homely broadcasts to the nation that were meant to sow consensus. But even they were too much for the government.

He claimed the new "Dunkirk spirit" meant "the British were all in the same boat" and the boat should "act as an ark in which we can finally land in a better world." So the Tories tried to get the BBC to sack him.

Within weeks of the declaration of war in September 1939 1.5 million working class women and children were evacuated to the suburbs and countryside.

But instead of being welcomed with open arms they were deeply resented. A Berkshire Congregational journal questioned the "necessity for the spoliation of decent homes and furniture or the corruption of speech or moral standards of our own children".

Some 90 percent of evacuees had returned home by the first Christmas of the war—not just for economic reasons.

THE CRISIS meant politics was meant to stop. Parties advised their members to do nothing. Bernard Newman toured the country for the Ministry of Information and reported that people were talking about personal issues, not politics.

But he meant they were talking about "post war housing, strikes, equal pay for equal work, income tax, the cut in the cheese ration, overcrowding in trains and buses, wasting petrol, shortages of matches, wages and the bad distribution of fish."

There was massive hoarding by the rich and a flourishing black market. And there was looting by the poor.

In 1940 Winston Churchill ordered Labour home secretary Herbert Morrison to hush up the conviction of six London firemen caught looting from a burned-out shop.

In April 1941 Lambeth juvenile court dealt with 42 children in one day. They ranged from teenage girls caught stripping clothes from dead bodies to a seven year old boy who stole five shillings from a gas meter.

Juvenile crime accounted for 48 percent of all arrests in the nine months between



September 1940 and May 1941 and there were 4,584 cases of looting. The accused included rescue workers, fire-fighters, police, bomb-disposal units and mortuary attendants.

On the evening of 8 March 1941 the Cafe de Paris in Piccadilly was hit by a bomb. The cafe was one of London's plush night spots.

Ballard Berkeley, a policeman who later found fame as the Major in 1970s comedy Fawlty Towers, recalled, "Some of the looters in the Cafe de Paris cut off the people's fingers to get the rings. The wounded were robbed of their jewellery amid the confusion and carnage."

All reported crime went up by 57 percent, but that not the only story.

On 14 September 1940, 40 demonstrators turned up at the plush Savoy hotel demanding tea, bread and butter in the middle of an air raid. Management had the choice of either ejecting them during the bombing or accommodating them to the disapproval of its patrons.

The protesters—Communist bootmakers and dockers seeking shelter—complained that those bedding down in the Savoy's basement with its "snore warden" and nurses enjoyed superior protection.

The East End working class, meanwhile, had no access to any kind of deep shelter.

The only shelters were above ground, and the government had refused to open the Underground.

The protesters found in Savoy basement a huge



Famous pictures of Britain keeping calm and carrying on, such as the milkman delivering in the rubble and readers in a bombed out library were staged (top two pictures) While posters celebrated a patriotic wartime ideal (above)



At times of crisis, everyone in Britain comes together to make the best of things and face our problems with a stiff upper lip—just like they did in the Second World War. Rubbish. Simon Basketter tells the real story of what happened in the Blitz

space with a dance floor on one side. On the other side there were sleeping quarters divided into separate areas for single men, single women and married couples.

The mattresses and camp beds had matching sheets and pillows in pink, green and blue. In a curtained recess lay the Duke and Duchess of Kent. Sandbags were packed against scaffolding poles painted in the colours of the union jack.

In contrast there was the squalid Tilbury shelter, a goods yard requisitioned which could accommodate 3,000 people. It held 17,000.

ON THE first night of the Blitz, 7 September 1940, people had taken matters into their own hands, climbed over the barricades and ran down the escalators to take shelter. Soon, 70,000 families queued every night. Portsmouth sometimes had daytime

bombing. But the authorities locked the shelters in the daytime. When workers tried to break the locks open, the police baton-charged. A riot ensued. Many were injured and two were killed. WHEN?

No more than 15 percent of London's population took to the Tube or other public shelters during raids. But they weren't safe.

In 1943, 173 people were crushed to death as a crowd tried to squeeze into Bethnal Green tube station at the start of an air raid.

As the bombs fell, the majority stayed at home. But their resilience was not some unique aspect of Britishness.

People of Berlin, Hamburg, Tokyo faced much greater devastation—and showed the same endurance. Left wing writer JB Priestley (right) put his pen at the disposal of the government's ministry of propaganda during the Blitz and after



CLASS WAR

Apprentices

The first major wartime dispute took place in 1941. It involved engineering apprentices in Clydeside, Coventry, Lancashire and London. They called for higher pay, a right to education on day release and a right to union representation. In Coventry they included women at the local munitions factory in the campaign. They won significant wage increases.

Rolls Royce

Thousands of women worked in wartime industry. In 1940, engineering bosses agreed that women would receive equal pay after 32 weeks. But Rolls Royce refused and were finally challenged by the AEU union in 1943. They settled. But 16,000 women, and some men, refused to accept the deal and walked out.

Betteshanger

In 1942 miners at Betteshanger Colliery in Kent struck over pay. The Ministry of Labour decided to prosecute 1,050 miners. Three local union officials were imprisoned. But the strike went on and other pits joined in. The home secretary dropped the prison sentences.

Miners

In 1944 miners were earning £5 a week when the average industrial manual wage was £6, 10shillings. Miners struck unofficially in South Wales, Kent, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Durham, and Scotland. The miners won. Their average earnings ranked 81st in 1938, but rose to 14th after the strikes.

Aircraft engineers

Workers at a factory making bomber parts were subject to Essential Works Orders banning all strikes.

In 1943 they challenged the policy of locking the gates at 8.30 in the morning by threatening to turn up all together at 8.31. After winning they also got an increase in the minimum wage.



WORKING CLASS people had to force their way into tube stations for shelter, which were overcrowded

Betrayed by Labour 'in the national interest'

WINSTON CHURCHILL said, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

Not his, of course. To be fair during the war, he was thoroughly drugged up on top of his permanent drunkenness.

Churchill argued among his peers that a revolutionary situation was developing in the country.

He wanted to suspend parliament, the introduction of martial law and the formation of a committee of public safety with dictatorial powers. Wiser minds saw that getting the trade unions and Labour on board to a national government would better hold back unrest.

Labour and union leaders were happy to oblige "in the national interest".

So in 1940 Labour, led by Clement Attlee, joined Winston Churchill's Tories in a coalition government that lasted throughout the war.

Labour backed the Emergency Powers Defence Bill which gave it "dictatorial powers for the foreseeable future".

Restore

Both Labour and the union leaders tried to restore industrial peace. The Communist Party also played its part after Russia joined the war.

In September 1943 when 20 collieries in Lanarkshire were idled, Communist Scottish miners' union leader Abe Moffat blamed anarchists, Trotskyists and the Duke of Bedford.

Class antagonisms did not disappear. In 1940 some 940,000 days were "lost" to strikes and in 1941 the figure rose to over a million. By 1944 it was 3,714,000.

The state possessed an armoury of 868 regulations, many deliberately couched in vague, ambiguous terms.

Workers were fined



LABOUR LEADER Attlee with Churchill

for staying at home to care for sick children or arriving at the factory late because of a transport hold-up. They could be fined for not working with sufficient enthusiasm.

In May 1945 Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour, told parliament that 18,436 people had been convicted for absenting themselves from work or being late without reasonable cause.

Some 1,323 were imprisoned. But fines and imprisonment often resulted in the downing of tools. Production only resumed once the punishments had been waived.

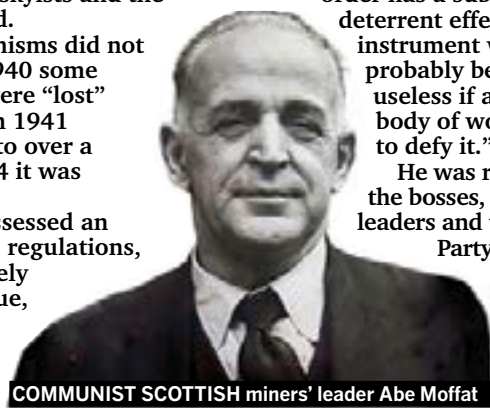
On 10 July 1940 the government had introduced Defence Regulation 58AA allowing banning of strikes. Order 1305 then allowed the Minister to refer any dispute to binding arbitration.

But as the Chief Industrial Commissioner recognised, the

"order has a substantial deterrent effect but it is an instrument which would probably be shown to be useless if any considerable body of workpeople chose to defy it."

He was right. Despite the bosses, Labour, union leaders and the Communist

Party, workers took action and won, sometimes influenced by a tiny number of Trotskyist activists.



COMMUNIST SCOTTISH miners' leader Abe Moffat



King George VI when he visited London's East End

WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties.

We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women. We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to www.swp.org.uk or phone 020 7840 5602 for more information

{ SOCIALIST WORKER } ONLINE MEETINGS

Weekly meetings to discuss political issues and our local interventions. All welcome.

BIRMINGHAM

Can workers run society?

Wed 8 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 281-634-5938

BLACK COUNTRY

The state and the crisis

Wed 8 Apr, 7.15pm
Zoom 352-891-2411

BRADFORD

Capitalism and the politics of food

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 655-361-711

BRIGHTON & HOVE

Capitalism and pandemics

Thu 9 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 391-959-428

BURNLEY & PENDLE

Socialism in a time of pandemics

Wed 8 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 446-409-5118

CAMBRIDGE

Socialists, the state and revolution

Thu 9 Apr, 5pm
Zoom 681-800-4408

CHESTERFIELD

Fake news and bias—who controls the media?

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 828-532-8731

DUNDEE & ABERDEEN

What will the Emergency Powers really mean?

Wed 8 Apr, 8pm
Zoom 396-573-1805

ESSEX

Universal basic income—is it the answer?

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 906-652-5299

HUDDERSFIELD

Can workers run society?

Wed 8 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 234-919-9440

KENT

Pandemics, capitalism and crisis

Thu 9 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 906-652-5299

LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE

Booklaunch: Transgender Resistance, Socialism and the Fight for Trans Liberation

with author Laura Miles
Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 992-204-9372

LEEDS

Can Marxism explain a world in crisis?

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 856-912-7408

LIVERPOOL

Get Trump's hands off Palestine

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

982-378-9813

LONDON: HACKNEY

The state and the crisis—is it acting on our behalf?

Thu 9 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 798-534-2585

LONDON: HARINGEY

Socialism in a time of pandemics

Wed 8 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 459-388-1576

LONDON: ISLINGTON

Socialism in a time of pandemics

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 874-012-7970

LONDON: NEWHAM

Coronavirus, capitalism and economic crisis

Wed 8 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 736-446-743

LONDON: SOUTH

Can workers run society?

Wed 8 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 497-196-1801

LONDON: SOUTH EAST

Can the NHS

survive under capitalism?
Wed 8 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom

529-913-6390

LONDON: TOWER HAMLETS

Coronavirus, staying at home and domestic violence

Wed 8 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 816-197-924

LONDON: WALTHAM FOREST

Can we be socialists in a crisis? Socialism and the apocalypse

Wed 8 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 543-023-057

MANCHESTER: CENTRE

The NHS in a time of pandemic

Wed 8 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

910-541-105

NEWCASTLE

Can the NHS survive under capitalism?

Wed 8 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 368-595-7212

NORWICH

Can workers run society?

Wed 8 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 906-652-5299

NOTTINGHAM

Racism, scapegoating and pandemics

Wed 8 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

476-494-708

OXFORD

Pandemics, capitalism and crisis

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

730-258-179

PORTSMOUTH & SOUTHAMPTON

Can workers run society?

Wed 8 Apr, 7.30pm
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SCOTLAND

The 700th anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath—the myths of Scottish nationalism

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 810-400-6058

SHEFFIELD & SOUTH

YORKSHIRE

Can workers run society?

Thu 9 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 528-174-9278

SWANSEA

#MeToo After Harvey Weinstein's conviction

Thu 9 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 248-448-3170

YORK & SCARBOROUGH

Capitalism and the politics of food

Wed 8 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 827-489-7492

Socialist Workers Party online meetings



The Socialist Workers Party is holding online meetings during the coronavirus crisis. This is to ensure that there can still be collective local discussion, organising and actions. Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the Zoom app onto your phone or computer and at the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate meeting. Make sure you look at the SWP Facebook page facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty for news of national online meetings and other updates.

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The Labour Party—A Marxist History
by Tony Cliff, Donny Gluckstein and Charlie Kimber, £14.99



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by Camilla Royle
£4



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by Terry Sullivan and Donny Gluckstein, £7



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What to watch and listen to when you are on lockdown

Feeling starved of culture now everything is closed? Don't worry, there's plenty online. **Socialist Worker** has had a look at some things you may have missed

YOU'VE BEEN stuck in the house for over a week. Home working isn't all it's cracked up to be. You've run out of excuses to go to the shops. And you've already had your state sanctioned daily exercise.

Socialist Worker culture page is here to help.

Why not watch a documentary? The BBC iplayer is a treasure trove of those—and it's got some hidden old gems from decades past.

Heart of the Angel follows 48 hours in the life of those working in London's Angel tube station in 1989. Or for more past city life **We Live by the River**, first shown in 1955, follows two boys from south east London on a day out around the post-war city.

If that's a bit London-centric there's also **The Colony**, a 1964 film about the lives of migrant workers from the Caribbean living in Birmingham.

Waiting for Work shows the lives of unemployed people in 1960s Hartlepool. And 1959's **Morning in the Streets** is simply "an impression of life and opinion in the back streets of a northern city in the morning"—Liverpool.

For contemporary documentaries, there's also **One Day in Gaza**. It's a documentary about Israel's May 2018 massacre of Palestinian protesters that claims to look at "both sides."

Leo—Becoming a Trans Man follows a 15 year old as he transitions gender. And **Alt-Right—Age of Rage** is an exposure of the far right in the US, culminating in Charlottesville.

If you pay for Netflix, there are some decent looking documentaries there too. One of them, **The Edge of Democracy**, follows the fall of Brazil's former presidents Lula and



SNOWPIERCER IS a class struggle sci-fi film available on Netflix

Dilma Rousseff, and the rise of far right Jair Bolsonaro.

But there are plenty of films and dramas you might not have seen as well. After the huge success of director Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* in cinemas this year, many people discovered his sci-fi action film **Snowpiercer**.

An entire class society is contained within one perpetually-moving train after a climate change disaster wiped out the rest of humanity.

A group of lower class citizens

from the back of the train fight to get to the front and spread the wealth around.

Or there's **Blindspotting**, a dark comedy drama about a man trying to make it through his last three days of probation when he witnesses a police shooting.

If it's not film you want, plenty of bands and performers are offering free online gigs.

The **Royal Opera House** is streaming free operas and ballets from its

YouTube and Facebook pages every Friday from 7pm. And the **National Theatre** will stream plays from its YouTube channel every Thursday, also from 7pm.

Socialist Worker will try to keep producing a culture page throughout the coronavirus outbreak. We'll do our best to keep reviewing new stuff—books, music, TV.

But some weeks we might just enjoy digging through what's available and telling you what we've found.

Fun night of performance direct to your living room

POETRY

HOLLIE MCNISH

On Facebook Live at holliepoetry, Thursday 2 April from 9pm. On Instagram Live @holliepoetry, Thursday 9 April from 9pm

POET AND spoken word artist Hollie McNish has had to postpone her spring tour.

Luckily, she is performing three gigs from her living room. It's a perfect chance to get to know or revisit her work.

The shows will weave old material with new

poems, including extracts from her forthcoming book *Slug*, out in February next year.

She's also performing her support acts' poems—and "drinking their wine". McNish's first gig featured pieces from Vanessa Kisuule and started with her poem *Not Worth Shaving Your Arsehole For*. It's a good opener for a fun hour.

If you're already a fan, you'll be pleased to see McNish performing old favourites on sexuality and motherhood.

Stand-outs in the



Hollie McNish live at home

first gig included *Bricks*, a reflection on a conversation with her grandma on sexual pleasure and how "sexiness is explained the same way day after day after day."

And in a time when it might be challenging to explain the news to kids, McNish shares her own experience of talking to her daughter about David Cameron's "pig incident".

McNish reflects common feelings about the world as it stands currently, lamenting restrictions on hugging our friends and

long train journeys.

Her shorter poems are sprinkled throughout.

Shoulders celebrates McNish's love for her favourite body part.

It's a reminder of how important it is to celebrate the parts of ourselves that we really like.

McNish shines in her delivery. Her chatty, straightforward, often hilarious style will light up your living room. And you've got full permission from the performer to wear what you want: "fancy, pyjamas or nude".

Siobhan Brown

OBITUARY

MANU DIBANGO

1933-2020

MANU Dibango's saxophone driven mix of jazz, funk and Cameroonian call and response verses helped put Africa at the centre of European pop in the early 1970s.

Born in the city of Douala in 1933, at 15 Manu was sent to Europe to study classical piano in Paris. But he was drawn to jazz, and he began playing saxophone in the early 1950s.

By the late 1960s he was looking at ways of branching out and reaching new audiences.

In 1972, long before the term "world music" gained its unfortunate currency,



Manu set out to 'blow minds'

Manu's song *Soul Makossa* was tearing up dancefloors across the world.

It was a statement of confidence, an echo from post-independence Africa, and it connected to both black and white dancers.

And, as a hybrid form that mixed African and European styles, it laid down a challenge to notions of Western cultural superiority.

His stuttered sax lines answered chanted vocals and was close to the funk sound of black America, but with an identity all of its own.

Manu's rhythms were a precursor to what would become known as disco and were soon incorporated by the New York DJs that were pioneering the scene.

Keen to use his new fame to advance African music, Manu toured with a mixture of established and up and coming artists, and created a thirst for music beyond boundaries.

When Bob Geldoff and his Band Aid pop star friends appointed themselves saviours of Africa, Manu was quick to smell a rat.

Why were no Africans in his celebrity line up? Why was the Live Aid concert so white, he asked.

To counter the problem Manu helped organise an all-Africa supergroup around the single *Tam Tam Pour l'Ethiopie*.

Manu's brilliant career was itself a challenge to the racism of the music industry.

JEREMY Corbyn's time as Labour leader is over.

It's a story of someone who channelled widespread desire for a radically different type of mainstream politics, but was restrained and broken by his own party.

When Labour lost the 2015 general election with Ed Miliband, the right thought it was because he wasn't similar enough to the Tories.

But after the election there was a reaction against them that showed huge numbers of people wanted something much different.

In the immediate aftermath tens of thousands of people joined impromptu marches often organised by school and college students.

They were followed by a national demonstration in central London organised by the People's Assembly, which claimed 250,000 people marched.

Anger at years of austerity, revulsion at racist scapegoating and bitterness at disastrous wars had been there the whole time.

It had just never been represented in mainstream politics.

When Corbyn stood for Labour leader he became a focus for that, channelling it into a Labour Party that until then had looked finished.

Corbyn's leadership campaign meetings grew into ever bigger rallies. By the end of the campaign, thousands of people would queue down the street to get in. Such scenes were completely unheard of in British politics.

In the end Corbyn won with more than twice the number of votes that his nearest rival, Andy Burnham, received.

From the outset, Labour MPs were determined to oust him.

They were convinced that Corbyn would mean electoral disaster, and horrified at his opposition to war and nuclear weapons.

They saw him as a threat to the interests of the British state—or to “security” and “the national interest” as they put it.

As people who hoped one day to manage the state, they were far more loyal to it than they were to their own membership.

Two of the first big defeats MPs inflicted on Corbyn were over war and nuclear weapons.

In 2015 Tory prime minister David Cameron hoped to join in bombing Syria.

Labour MPs threatened to rebel against Corbyn unless he allowed them to vote in favour of bombing—which he did.

At that year's Labour Party conference, the right—with the help of trade union leaders—blocked a debate on ending support for Trident nuclear missiles.

In parliament, Corbyn was isolated from the mass support of Labour's membership and held hostage by his own MPs.

Yet the pressure to maintain



WHY CORBYN COULDN'T BEAT CAPITAL

As Jeremy Corbyn ends his time as Labour leader Nick Clark looks at the impact he had—and at what happens when Labour's methods are used to win change

the “unity” of the Labour Party in parliament stopped him fighting back.

After the Brexit referendum of 2016, Labour MPs staged a “coup” against Corbyn. He was saved by Labour's mass membership.

After facing a no confidence vote, he went straight from a meeting of Labour MPs to a mass rally in his support outside parliament. Instead of resigning, Corbyn faced a new leadership election.

The right resigned themselves to Corbyn's leadership. Instead of trying to get rid of him, they



Labour MPs threatened to rebel unless he allowed them to vote in favour of bombing—which he did

focussed on slowly undermining him and pushing him to the right—in particular over Brexit.

Again, in parliament Corbyn was at their mercy.

Over time they pushed him into accepting various demands championed by the right over Brexit, who wanted Labour to stay as close to the status quo.

These included access to the bosses' single market, but dropping freedom of movement for migrants.

Corbyn was caught between right wing MPs, a membership who saw Remain as a left wing alternative to the Tories' right

wing Brexit, and voters who wanted to Leave.

Many Labour MPs secretly hoped that the snap general election of 2017 would mean the end for Corbyn.

They were badly wrong Corbyn went for broke with a campaign that defied convention and what the right thought it should be.

Labour's manifesto was full of unashamedly left wing policies that until then had been anathema to mainstream politicians.

At its heart was a simple message—an end to turgid mainstream politics that promised unrelenting austerity, and a future to be excited about.

Once again the campaign was characterised by mass rallies, this time drawing tens of thousands of ordinary people.

They gave the campaign a sense of insurgency and a whiff of struggle and fighting back.

Instead of a humiliating defeat, Labour denied the Tories their majority.

It felt like a win for the left—and stunned right wing MPs and sneering media commentators into a brief moment of humility.

BUT IT wasn't long before the right wing offensive resumed. Accusations of antisemitism against the left reached their crescendo in 2018.

The right claimed Corbyn's support for Palestinian resistance encouraged antisemites to join the Labour Party, where they were tolerated.

The central aim was to fundamentally discredit the left and its ideas. One of Corbyn's biggest mistakes was backing down in the face of this.

In March 2018 the right forced Labour to adopt a definition of antisemitism that categorised certain criticisms of Israel—including calling it a racist state—as antisemitic.

Every concession and apology gave credibility to the idea that the left is inherently antisemitic.

At the same time, over several months the right gradually edged Labour closer towards backing a right wing, pro-EU policy.

They first demanded Labour backs a second referendum instead of an early election, then having won that in 2018, demanded that Labour backs Remain.

Corbyn also faced another problem completely built into his position of leader and his goal of leading a government.

After the 2017 election, Corbyn looked closer than ever to becoming prime minister and managing the state.

That came with a pressure to appear more respectable, more prime ministerial, and more appealing to the right.

He stopped appearing at mass rallies and demonstrations over issues such as racism, the NHS

or solidarity with Palestine.

Meanwhile shadow chancellor John McDonnell tried to win over top bankers and business leaders with promises of certainty and cooperation. “There's nothing up my sleeve,” he claims to have told City fat cats.

Corbyn was also less able to advocate the anti-war rhetoric he was known for. Arguments about war and terrorism were now couched in the language of “security” and the national interest.

There were promises of support for the army, and more funding for the cops.

Labour also shifted to the right over migration, with promises to introduce restrictions on migrant workers in the form of a divisive “skills-based” system.

In the 2019 general election Corbyn attempted a more “professional” campaign. There were no rallies or the sense of a mass movement that had been so crucial to his success.

And the Labour Party's move last year to support a second referendum on membership of the European Union was a major shift from its policy in 2017.

Corbyn was unable to stand strong in the face of pressure to keep the line that Labour held two years previously.

This resulted in many Labour-supporting Leave voters feeling that the party and Corbyn had ignored their vote.

Labour's general election campaign failed.

The argument that working class people would never vote for Labour while it had a left wing leader came back with a vengeance.

Corbyn announced his coming resignation.

With the pressure to appear respectable and responsible lifted, he suddenly started reappearing at rallies and left wing meetings.

At a protest against the threat of war with Iran, veteran activist Tariq Ali told him, “Welcome home.”

“We need you here,” Ali told Corbyn. He should never have left in the first place.

Corbyn was always at his strongest when connected to activity outside parliament.

But he was constantly pulled away from that by a fatal flaw at the heart of the Labour Party.

Labour doesn't want to destroy capitalism—only to manage it and try to reform it through parliament.

READ MORE

● **Antisemitism: The Far Right, Zionism And the Left**
by Rob Ferguson
£3

● **The Labour Party: A Marxist History**
by Tony Cliff, Donny Gluckstein and Charlie Kimber £14.99

Available at Bookmarks, the socialist bookshop. Phone 020 7637 1848 or go to bookmarksbookshop.co.uk



FOCUS ON THE CRISIS

Capitalism brings people together—perhaps to bury it

We're encouraged to see ourselves as competing individuals. But capitalism enables collective action that undermines those ideas, says Sarah Bates

NHS BOSS Dr Nikita Kanani says she is “rallying the troops and telling the public—your NHS needs you”.

“This is one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments where a single action from one person can be the difference between life and death for another,” she said.

Kanani was talking about NHS Volunteers—the hundreds of thousands-strong initiative to support health and charity services. It echoes government rhetoric that everybody “doing their bit” will be critical to halting the spread of coronavirus.

When it suits those at the top of society, ordinary people are encouraged to see themselves as part of a homogeneous community.

They cynically talk of a “national effort” because it taps into a real desire by people to collectively support each other. At the same time, they're still blaming individuals for panic buying or going to work on the Tube.

Contradiction

Coronavirus has heightened a contradiction within capitalism—a system that pushes us together and pulls us apart at the same time.

People are encouraged to see themselves as individuals who are all able to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps”. And, if someone is unable to do this, it's portrayed as a personal failing, rather than a result of political, social and economic conditions.

If someone relies on a food bank they are often painted as not trying hard enough. In fact it's a consequence of factors such as insecure, low-paid work and benefit cuts, not poor household budgeting.

More than 40 years of neoliberalism has reinforced



LEAFLETING FOR a mutual aid group in south London

NHS boss Dr Nikita Kanani

ruling class ideas about individualism. It has seen Tory and Labour governments savage the welfare state, privatise public services and shackle trade unions.

Sometimes individualism can fit with people's experience. If you're applying for a job, for instance, there are often hundreds of other people going for it too.

But there is an antidote to a society that divides us. Capitalism brings together huge numbers of people in workplaces.

That's not to say that everyone in a workplace is friends or they agree on everything. But workers have a common experience of being exploited by bosses.

It produces the conditions for workers to see



Workers have a common experience of being exploited by bosses

themselves as more than atomised individuals and take collective action.

And working class people fighting back together outside workplaces can also help to forge class consciousness.

This solidarity cuts through the ideas fed from the top of society that we are all individuals trying to climb the greasy pole.

Sometimes workers behave in ways that are individualistic or greedy and accept some ruling class ideas.

But despite that working class people have a common interest—and ability—to overthrow our rotten system. The revolutionary Karl Marx argued that capitalism, by bringing workers together, “produces its own gravediggers”.

The working class holds a unique position of power within capitalism.

One thing we've learned in the coronavirus crisis is how workers dismissed as “low skilled” are key to keeping things running.

When they act together, workers are able to bring the system to a grinding halt.

A spirit of organised, collective action, has driven the mutual aid groups delivering food and medication to vulnerable people. And a similar desire for a better world drives other battles—opposition to war, imperialism, racism and climate change.

Socialists should argue to generalise these fightbacks into one that uses our collective strength to take on the entire capitalist system.

John McDonnell

Health service cuts legacy puts lives at risk

by YURI PRASAD

WHY IS the NHS failing to get the right protective equipment to health workers coming face to face with coronavirus?

Hospitals are running out of masks and frontline staff have been forced to share or improvise.

Health secretary Matt Hancock said last week he would move “heaven and earth” to solve the problem.

The reason for the failure does not centre on a lack of stock but an inability to get the right equipment to the right place at the right time.

To understand why, we need to go back to the governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in the early 2000s.

Despicable

In particular we need to look at the despicable role of Patrick Carter or Baron Carter of Coles, as he prefers to be known.

Socialist Worker last week pointed to the baron’s work in helping privatise hospital pathology labs. This means

BACK STORY

A history of privatisation makes it harder for the NHS to cope with Covid-19

- Key services have been handed over to bosses
- These include contracts to run pathology services and supply equipment
- Bosses raked in billions of pounds of public money—and trimmed down services
- Health care should be run for people and not for profit

that Britain is unable to test for coronavirus on anything like the scale of many other countries.

In 2006 Carter turned his mind to how to make big savings by streamlining the NHS procurement and distribution systems.

In one of the biggest ever health privatisations, the NHS Purchasing and Supplies Agency was broken up and the NHS Logistics section handed over to the firm DHL.

The contract was worth

LACK OF equipment during this crisis is the result of years of cuts

a staggering £22 billion. Workers were livid and launched the first national strike in the NHS for almost 20 years, but private bosses eventually got their way.

DHL then brought in its healthcare specialist, Novation. Its job was to help trim down the newly formed

NHS Supply Chain so that it was cost effective and ran as lean as possible.

This was touted by New Labour politicians as “best practice”.

This “best practice” had already led to Novation being investigated by the US justice department,

concerned by claims that the company overcharged federal healthcare programmes.

Health insiders told of chaos in DHL’s operation with new technology failing and NHS trusts across Britain up in arms about lack of stock of vital equipment.

But smelling large amounts

of cash to be made by further slashing staff and costs, other private sector vultures soon began circling.

Unipart, once the parts division of the British Leyland car firm, won the contract after undercutting DHL in a bidding war in 2018.

Many experts said their offer must have been unrealistically low to win, and pointed out that Unipart had no experience in healthcare.

The firms that wanted a slice of the privatised NHS pie knew they had to compete on price, and the way to do that was to close warehouses, further outsource drivers and IT departments.

In the process the NHS lost vital expertise and any extra capability it had to react to a crisis.

The real price of Blair’s era of privatisation is now becoming clear—the inability of the NHS supply chain to get the most basic and necessary equipment to those who lives depend on it.

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New benefit claims soar after bosses savage jobs

Soaring claims for Universal Credit have laid bare a cruel benefit system, says **Sadie Robinson**

NEARLY HALF a million people put in claims for Universal Credit (UC) in a nine-day period as the coronavirus crisis hit.

The figure underlines how the Tory pledge to pay 80 percent of some workers' wages is nowhere near enough to protect everyone.

Workers are being thrown out of jobs as restaurants, pubs, shops and services close down. They now face a horrifying battle to claim benefits.

Andrew from Luton got through to the UC helpline on the third attempt after nearly three hours on hold.

"They've given me a date for a telephone interview in early April," he told Socialist Worker. "It's ridiculous because you fill in lots of things online, but then you have to make this phone call.

"And all they do is make an appointment for another call. It's just a barrier to put people off claiming."

Some 477,000 claims for UC were made between Monday of last week and Wednesday. Tens of thousands of people have been trapped in lengthy telephone or online queues.

Andrew explained that he urgently needs benefits. "I'm living with my parents who are both at high risk regarding coronavirus due to their age," he said. "I'm moving to a friend's house and I'll need to pay rent."

Insecure

The swathe of job losses as coronavirus bites has lifted a lid on the awful working conditions faced by so many people. Andrew got a First class degree last year. Yet he has suffered months of working in insecure, short-term jobs.

"I've been to 13 different employment agencies, and only one gave me any work," he said.

He was on the verge of a permanent job when the virus hit.

"The agency sent me to a warehouse as a temp," he said. "They said after 13 weeks everyone was likely to be made permanent. After

BACK STORY

Universal Credit (UC) claims have soared as jobs are slashed

● Nearly half a million people claimed UC in just one nine-day period last month

● The figures show how the Tory pledge to pay 80 percent of some workers' pay isn't enough

● Now desperate people face an impossible task of getting their welfare claims processed

● There's a risk that tens of thousands will be left without money or support for weeks

four days in the warehouse, coronavirus strikes."

Andrew argued the system should be urgently transformed.

"They need to make it easier to claim benefits," he said. "They should take on a lot more staff. The amount of money is just £94 a week—it should be better than that.

"They also need to suspend all the conditions that go with these benefits. They can't seriously say anyone should be looking for work at the moment."

The Tories will have blood on their hands if they leave half a million people penniless with a lengthy wait for meagre benefits.

Activists, trade unionists and campaigners need to demand much more far-reaching measures to keep people safe and supported.

"There could be a universal payment to everyone," said Andrew. "That wouldn't cost as much as bailing out the banks in 2008.

"You hear about Universal Credit and think it's not very nice. But you don't realise that you are not that far from being in quite a desperate position yourself.

"The coronavirus crisis has exposed a very cruel system."



On other pages...

'National unity' and the myth of the Blitz >>> **Pages 10 & 11**

BENEFIT CLAIMS have soared as bosses throw workers out of jobs during the coronavirus crisis

No hand sanitiser, no distancing and no protection—workers speak out

BOSSES HAVE continued to put workers at risk by pressuring people to work during the coronavirus crisis.

RMT union rep Paddy works on London Underground.

"People are trying to distance themselves from customers, but that's easier said than done," he told Socialist Worker.

He added that it was some time before workers were given rubber gloves and hand gel.

The Tories have criticised Transport for London for running a reduced service on London Underground.

But the real problem is the bosses who continue to call people into workplaces and force them onto busy trains and buses.

Survive

"The government says, 'Don't travel to work,' but if you survive on that work, it's essential," said Paddy.

He said transport workers are demanding that ticket machines are shut and gates opened, to reduce contact between workers and passengers.

"A walkout is possible if a red line is crossed, and workers believe

that their health is in danger," he said.

Workers for delivery giant Amazon have also continued working in crowded warehouses.

Staff have said they have no hand sanitiser or reusable gloves.

Amazon owner Jeff Bezos is the richest man on the planet. Yet he is touting an "Amazon relief fund" for working class people to donate to support Amazon staff.

The government said that businesses deemed "non-essential" should close.

But call centre worker Jeremy told Socialist Worker that bosses are trying to "find loopholes to flout the instructions" and "putting workers' health at risk".

Jeremy works at a logistics firm that delivers luxury furniture for Marks and Spencer and high end brands.

"Management emailed all staff stating that we are all key workers and we are to continue to work as normal," he said.

"We're not delivering PPE or medical supplies to hospitals, we're delivering expensive furniture to quite well off people."

And bosses have tried to squeeze more out of staff. Management

texted workers on Monday night to say they did not have to come in.

"But then on Tuesday morning management said we have to come in," Jeremy explained.

"Because we were in half an hour late, we weren't entitled to a lunch break.

Tea

"They said we had to work eight hours to get lunch off and would only have a 15 minute tea break."

Meanwhile, Sir Philip Green's Arcadia Group—which includes brands such as Top shop—is keeping its online business open.

Taj used to work at one of Arcadia's warehouses in Solihull, near Birmingham, until he was sacked on Friday 13 March.

"They are trying to consolidate everything in Rugby where they can fit in all of the brands," he told Socialist Worker.

Taj now worries about finding work or accessing support.

"I've got two weeks' pay for the last month and that's the last of it," he said.

Bosses haven't stopped their attacks. Unions must not avoid fighting them.

Paddy is a pseudonym

Pressure of 'unity' sees Labour shift rightwards

Keir Starmer is likely to carve out the left from top posts if he wins the leadership, writes Nick Clark

THE LABOUR Party leadership contest was set to finally end this Thursday with the result to be announced on Saturday.

Keir Starmer, the shadow Brexit secretary, looked on course to win after campaigning on a promise to unite Labour's left with the right.

He promised to continue the legacy of Jeremy Corbyn's left wing leadership, while making the party appear more respectable and acceptable to the right.

His apparent popularity is a sign that many party members have been pulled by the argument that Labour lost the 2019 general election because it was too left wing.

Starmer says that under his leadership, Labour would remain an anti-austerity party—but has refused to say he would keep the radical policies in the 2019 manifesto.

He also joined in with the attempt by right wing MPs to remove Corbyn in 2016, resigning his shadow cabinet post to pressure him to resign.

And he was led the way in pushing Labour towards a policy of reversing the EU referendum result—which was behind Labour's disastrous result in the 2019 general election.

He is also backed by right wing MPs who openly want to drag the party back to the right—and reportedly plans to bring some of them into his shadow cabinet.

Shadow

Rachel Reeves is reported to be Starmer's choice for shadow chancellor.

She has previously implied that immigration could cause race riots, and has said Labour should be "tougher" on benefit claimants.

Starmer is also certain to launch a witch hunt against the left under the guise of building unity.

He will reportedly demand that general secretary Jenny Formby—an ally of Corbyn—resigns because she didn't rush to expel left wing

BACK STORY

The winner of the Labour leadership election was set to be announced on Saturday

● Shadow Brexit secretary Keir Starmer looked likely to take over from Jeremy Corbyn

● He has promised to unite the left and right of the party

● His leadership would pursue a 'scorched earth' policy to marginalise the left

● The left's candidate Rebecca Long-Bailey has also made concessions to the right

members accused of antisemitism. One Corbyn aide described Starmer's plans as a "scorched earth" policy against the left.

The left's candidate Rebecca Long-Bailey is widely seen as Corbyn's successor.

Retreat

But she also shows signs of retreating from the more radical aspects of Corbyn's leadership.

She has run a more polished, conventional leadership campaign, without the mass rallies that defined Corbyn's.

And she backs Angela Rayner to be her deputy leader rather than the left wing candidate Richard Burgon.

She's also backed rules that would allow left wing activists to be purged from Labour for anything more than the mildest criticism of Israel.

Labour lost the general election partly because its leadership under Corbyn consistently conceded to right wing arguments, allowing them to take hold and undermine him.

Now the pressures of "unity" and "electability" look set to drag the party even further to the right.



On other pages...

Why Corbyn couldn't beat capital
>>Pages 14&15

WILL SIR Keir Starmer arise as Labour leader and bend his knee to the bosses?

UNITED STATES

Donald Trump forced into climbdown over lockdown as corona cases mount

>>>continued from page 20
nothing and I will get absolutely nothing because in their tax returns I'm filed as a dependent," she told Socialist Worker.

"I have student loans I will need to start paying back after I graduate this semester. "I lost my federal work-study job as a result of being evicted from my university."

But the Trump administration the government is looking after the bosses. "We could have guaranteed universal health care for every person in the US for £1.6 trillion," said Kayla. "Yet it's corporations that are being bailed out again."

Begging

She added, "Healthcare workers are begging for the supplies.

"They know they're soon going to have to start choosing who lives and who dies as ventilators run out.

Trump's business as usual response has seen dozens of walkouts in workplaces across the US. Several hundred refuse workers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, struck unofficially last Wednesday and are not returning to work unless bosses bring in safety measures.

One worker said, "We want better equipment, protective gear—we have no masks." Many

of them are purchasing their own protective gloves and masks.

Workers have also accused the city's sanitation department of not alerting them that one of their colleague's partners tested positive for Covid-19.

Bus drivers in Birmingham, Alabama, refused to work without protective masks last Monday.

One the same day abattoir workers in Kathleen, Georgia, walked out to demand hazard pay.

"There are wildcat actions going on," explained Reece. "This is the labour force realising they have power."

Kayla and others are agitating for a rent strike on 1 April.

"Millions have or are trying to file for unemployment, but most landlords are still forcing them to pay rent," she said.

"Letters from landlords have been sent to tenants along the lines of, 'We know you have lost your jobs but you don't have the right not to pay rent'."

Support for a rent strike is gaining momentum in the US.

Kayla said, "This is the first time I have seen national popular calls for a rent strike, and people openly calling to abolish landlords.

The walkouts and protests shows that workers have to power to resist bosses during the coronavirus crisis.

Sanitation workers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, walked out over safety

CAR INDUSTRY

Don't let the bosses reopen car factories

by CHARLIE KIMBER

CAR BOSSES are drawing up plans to restart production at plants in Britain and Europe producing non-essential vehicles. They must be stopped

PSA group, which owns Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port plant on Merseyside and the Luton van plant, announced two weeks ago that its European sites would close until 27 March.

This followed sustained strikes in France and other countries demanding that safety comes before profits.

Now bosses say a timetable will be drawn up to restart operations. Carlos Tavares, chair of Groupe PSA's managing board, said, "We will not compromise on the health of our employees."

Giant

But during the coronavirus crisis there is no safe way of running giant car plants. Ellesmere Port employs over 1,000 people and Luton 1,250.

The danger is that some unions will back the plans.

Automotive World website reports that PSA's human resources department "presented this project to

THERE IS no safe way to run car plants

representatives of trade union organisations who made their own contributions".

Bosses will seek to play one plant off against another.

They will dangle before union leaders the prospect of investment at sites that restart—and closure in the longer term at those that don't go back to work.

Bosses tried to agree plans to restart production at PSA in France last week. But workers' action stopped them.

Vincent Duse, a CGT union member at PSA, said, "It was the anger and the mobilisation of the workers that imposed this postponement. "They refused the resumption of production at the height of the pandemic."

In an article on the Revolution Permanente website he wrote, "How many sick and dead will it take for PSA, a company that has made billions from the exploitation of workers, to

make the decision to leave their employees at home?"

"And do not come to tell us that engine parts are necessary to fight the disease as suggested by the management to blame those who do not want to die for the profits of PSA."

Unions, principally Unite, must refuse any resumption of production in Britain during the crisis—and workers must receive their full wages.

SOCIAL WORKERS

Workers in east London block 'business as usual'

SOCIAL WORKERS in east London have managed to push back management's attempts to carry on with "business as usual" during the coronavirus crisis.

Simon, who works in children's services, told Socialist Worker that workers received conflicting messages about social distancing rules. "We had management saying it was business as usual," he said.

"But we could pass on infection to vulnerable families. Then we had a boss email out saying home visits should still go ahead—I thought, 'Are you not

watching the updates?"

Although workers "felt unsupported from people at the top," Simon said workers have collaborated to find the best way to deliver their key service.

"The only way we're getting through it is speaking to each other and thinking of our own solutions," he said.

There has been at least one incident of a manager implying that a self-isolating worker would have to use annual leave. But they backed off after pressure from the local branch of the workers' Unison union.

●Simon is a pseudonym

CIVIL SERVICE



PCS members at Beis (not the department below) won last year

PCS union rep says we can still organise and win

PCS UNION activists in a civil service department have channelled anger by workers to make bosses give in over health and safety demands.

One PCS rep told Socialist Worker that the union had pressured foot-dragging bosses into giving guarantees over pay and home working.

"First of all we have got everyone working from home," she said. "People had previously been told that home working was impossible because there wasn't the tech. Those people are now working at home, with the tech."

"We also have assurances that time off due to coronavirus won't come from annual sick allowance. Pay won't be halved after six months off, and the time won't trigger a disciplinary process."

Cleaners

She added that the union had also made some gains for outsourced cleaners and agency workers. "We've had offices closed except for appointments. We want cleaners and agency staff to continue to be paid. That's now sorted in some offices."

The rep said, "The pressure is coming from members."

"They're going to managers saying, we can't do this, we can't do that."

"Where there's pushback,

that's when we come in."

She also said the union had already had three meetings for all members over the Skype video conferencing programme, with big turnouts at each. There were over 200 members on the first meeting, and even more over two meetings held on the same day a week later.

She said reps used these to come up with lists of demands to put to senior management.

"The fact that so many members are involved is really good," she said—adding that the campaign had helped to recruit agency workers to the union.

And there's still more to fight for.

"It feels like we're turning the tanker," said the rep. "The biggest demand now is that parents and carers cannot do full time hours."

"Some people have to look after very young children at home during the day, and they cannot be expected to make up that work in the evenings and the weekends—this is working people to death."

"We also want agency workers and cleaners to be directly employed. This is something we can push further down the line. We're not going to let this go."

Nick Clark

SCHOOLS

Keeping children and school workers safe builds union

TRADE UNIONISTS fear that the Tories are putting the most vulnerable children at risk by failing to close schools for children with disabilities.

The government announced the closure of schools earlier this month, and said schools would only remain open to teach the children of "key workers".

But many children with special educational needs, disabilities or behavioural problems are still going to school.

Sally Kincaid is Wakefield and District divisional secretary for the NEU union.

She told Socialist Worker, "It's a very mixed picture across the country. Some special schools and pupil referral units closed immediately. But others are still open."

"These schools have the most vulnerable children

in them. For some, existing health problems mean that if they caught coronavirus they would be more likely to suffer complications."

"And much of the time, there can't be 'social distancing'. Some children need help with washing and doing other basic things."

Support

Sally said the best solution would be for vulnerable children to be at home—and stressed that parents must be given support to make that possible.

Across education, school workers are coming forward to volunteer to be on rotas to keep schools open for the children of key workers.

But in some cases, workers are coming under pressure to be in regardless of whether they feel it is safe to do so. "I had one union member ring me in floods

of tears last Sunday saying the head teacher had asked her to go in and clean her classroom," said Sally.

"Another has a daughter suffering from mental distress and she can't be in work. But her head teacher is threatening to not pay her if she doesn't put herself on the rota."

But fears over keeping workers and children safe, and calls for parents with



Some of the most vulnerable children are under threat

children at home to be properly supported, are also making more workers get organised.

Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the NEU, tweeted on Wednesday, "To the thousands of teachers, leaders and support staff who have joined the @NEUUnion over the past 7 days—welcome!"

Sally said, "The union has stepped up to the mark and membership in our area is going up every day. And people are also becoming union reps."

"We set up a Wakefield NEU WhatsApp group and people piled in. Now we have sub-groups responsible for different things."

"Rather than just getting angry, people are finding collective responses to issues that might have seemed individual."

"Everyone is unionising."

FRESH SAFETY STRIKES IN ITALY

by SIMON BASKETTER

WORKERS IN Italy are resisting bosses' attempts to benefit from the coronavirus crisis.

Metal workers in Lombardy and Lazio in northern Italy held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday of last week.

They were protesting over having to work at companies not considered essential during the outbreak.

Textile and chemical workers also struck.

Two weeks ago a wave of unofficial action brought shutdowns and improved safety for workers.

Hammered

The government and unions sat round the table and hammered out a deal to keep business going.

Prime minister Giuseppe Conte has been adamant that, "Italy does not stop."

Some 80 industries and an estimated 12 million workers were designated essential. Despite warm promises to the unions, keeping business going has been the order of the day.

In Lombardy, metal



HEALTH WORKERS in Italy take part in a stoppage last week

workers' unions protested that the list of "essential" industries and workers had been "excessively extended, covering areas of dubious importance".

Paolo Pirani, head of the Uiltec chemical and textile workers' union, said, "The decree allows a lot of firms to remain open, many without the proper safety norms. It

creates conditions not agreed with us and fans a lot of concern among workers."

The metal workers' strike came amid repeated walkouts at Amazon plants,

including the giant Torrazza Piemonte facility, and threats of a walkout by petrol station attendants and owners.

At the time of writing, the government had managed to

keep the petrol stations open.

The crisis has triggered renewed walkouts as workers demand shutdowns and improved safety measures.

Workers at the shipbuilder Fincantieri in Liguria, where a worker tested positive for Covid-19, have been on strike since 19 March.

The action has spread to other company dockyards in the area.

Workers at the Ilva steelworks in the southern region of Puglia declared a ten-day strike due to lack of protective equipment.

One of the smaller union federations, Unione Sindacale di Base, also held a general strike throughout Italy to push for all non-essential industries to close.

It has several hundred thousand members mainly in logistics companies, such as Amazon and TNT, and on farms. The action was backed by all the left parties that are not in government.

The union federation also called a symbolic one-minute stoppage for emergency workers, which had a take up beyond the union including among firefighters and medical staff.

Trump forced into small climbdown as death toll and US virus count rise

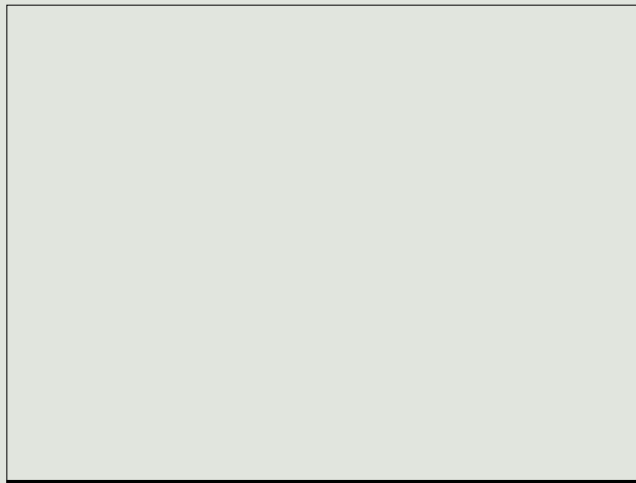
by SOPHIE SQUIRE

THE US last week overtook China to become the country with the highest number of corona virus cases.

Donald Trump celebrated the fact, saying that this was a "tribute to our testing".

The two leading health officials on Trump's Coronavirus Task Force last weekend warned of the scale of potential deaths.

Anthony Fauci is the director of the National



Donald Trump and one of his medical advisors, Anthony Fauci

Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

He said the crisis could result in "millions of cases" in the US and "between 100,000 and 200,000 deaths".

Last Saturday Trump said he was moving towards ordering an "enforceable" quarantine on the entire New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region, covering some 30 million people.

This was met with incredulity and he retreated.

Trump has also

been forced to extend measures such as social distancing until at least 30 April.

He had previously suggested that they could be relaxed as early as Easter, which falls in mid-April.

Trump has suggested that surgical mask shortages in coronavirus hot spots, such as New York City, are down to hospital staff stealing them.

Reece is a US socialist who had been living in New York until the outbreak of the virus and

is now staying in Vermont.

He told Socialist Worker that many people are making similar moves away from New York and other badly hit areas.

"If people are able to afford it, they are getting out of the city," he said.

Kayla, a socialist student activist currently living in Massachusetts, told Socialist Worker how desperate the situation is getting for her and millions of others across the US.

"I reckon my parents will get basically >>>continued on page 18